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ABSTRACT

This report describes Minnesota's thirteen Council on Quality Education (CQE) Early Childhood/Family Education programs from the perspective of external evaluation researchers. Data were obtained from personal on-site interviews with 40 program staff members; personal interviews with 40 local program Advisory Board participants and local school officials; telephone interviews with 127 parent participants; and direct observations of 24 program activities. The report is largely descriptive, although clearly labeled interpretations have been included to provide an external perspective on the implementation of the CQE programs. The report is written in two parts. The first and major part attempts to provide an overview of all 13 programs, to identify and describe patterns that cut across programs, and to paint an aggregate picture of the total CQE early childhood/family education effort. Program components, strengths and weaknesses, staffing, effectiveness, justification and rationale, CQE's role and parent's perspectives on the program are discussed. The second part of the report very briefly overviews site-by-site variations. (Author/RH)

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# AN EXTERNAL REVIEW OF EARLY CHILDHOOD AND FAMILY EDUCATION PILOT PROGRAMS: ABRIDGED REPORT

An Evaluation Report Submitted to the
Minnesota State Council on Quality Education

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Minneapolis, Minnesota
March, 1977

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# INTRODUCTION

This report describes the thirteen Council on Quality Education Early Childhood/Family Education programs from the perspective of external evaluation researchers. The data come from personal on-site interviews with forty program staff members; personal interviews with forty local program Advisory Board participants and local school officials; telephone interviews with 127 parent participants; and direct observations of twenty-four program activities. The report is largely descriptive, though we have included interpretations (clearly labeled as such) in accordance with our understanding of the evaluation mandate, namely, to provide an external perspective on the implementation and effectiveness of these programs.

We began this evaluation effort in early February having had no prior contact with these programs and in complete ignorance of their purpose, functioning, and outcomes. Members of the CQE staff and members of the CQE State Advisory Board for Early Childhood/Family Education Programs reviewed and discussed research instruments during their development. Program staff were uniformly cordial, cooperative, and open to our inquiries and observations.

While the evaluation was constrained by the usual limitations of time and resources, we feel confident that this intensive effort has resulted in a relatively thorough and in-depth review of overall program implementation. We initially expected to provide nothing but purely descriptive information in the event that the very short time schedule did not permit sufficient data collection to warrant judgments and interpretations. Having collected and analyzed the data we now feel

that we would be remiss if we did not share with the reader our conclusion that, on the whole, these are outstanding demonstration programs -- carefully conceived, diligently implemented and enthusiastically received by program participants.

As full-time evaluators we see a large variety of programs. It is rare, in our experience, to find a group of programs of such generally high caliber. We conclude this evaluation with a strong sense that these are programs deserving of greater public attention. That, at any rate, is our opinion after intensive study of these programs. Readers are urged to draw their own conclusions from the data which follow.

* * *

The report is written in two parts. The first part attempts to provide an overview of all thirteen programs, to identify and describe patterns that cut across programs, and to paint an aggregate picture of the total CQE early childhood/family education effort. The first part will discuss overall program implementation; the strengths and weaknesses of various program components; staff and non-staff views on program effectiveness; program operations (outreach, facilities, staffing and relationships to schools and community agencies); local program evaluation; program rationales; and overall parent participant reaction.

The second part of the report presents interview information and observation data on site-by-site variations. In the second part we shall attempt to briefly capture the unique character of each individual program site. Three kinds of information will be provided about each site: (1) an overview statement outlining the nature, activities, special features, and basic thrust of each program; (2) full and detailed descriptions of program activities observed on the day of each site visit; and (3) comments made by parents in response to open-ended telephone interview questions.

## PROGRAM COMPONENTS

Each of the thirteen CQE Early Childhood and Family Education Programs is different. Each is designed by program staff and participants to meet what they feel are local needs and interests. One of the ways in which programs differ from site to site is the degree to which the various program components are implemented and emphasized. Other differences include variations in target populations, schedules, staffing patterns, program content, relationships to public schools, and facilities. In the second section of this report we shall describe each site, highlight the unique aspects of the different sites, and present fully the direct observation descriptions recorded in each site.

This section of the report, however, is aimed at providing an overview of all thirteen programs. Here we shall be investigating patterns that cut across the unique and singular aspects of local sites. Here we shall be looking at the aggregate, attempting to merge the separate and distinct glimpses we obtained at different sites into a more general composite. The findings in this section are based largely on the information obtained in eighty interviews at the thirteen sites, forty interviews with program staff members and forty interviews with Advisory Board members, principals, and other school officials.

### Implementation Evaluation: An Approach and An Opening Interpretation

The primary task of this evaluation is to study program implementation. The degree to which programs are implemented in accordance with original intent and overall goals is a key evaluation issue. The evaluation literature suggests that a large proportion of programs fail at the implementation stage. Often the original legislative intent becomes a facade behind which staff do whatever they please. In this case the intent of the

Legislature and CQE is clear: "The programs are designed to emphasize parent and family education and not to provide primary child-care services."*

There are a number of ways in which this intent might fail to be realized. Given the current demand for child-care and daycare services, it would be relatively easy for these programs to offer a token bit of parent education and a lot of child-care, particularly if local staff are primarily trained in pre-school activities. Or again, parents might resist education efforts aimed at them and, in the face of such resistance, local staff might re-direct their efforts to impact primarily on the children. These are only two of many possible diversionary motifs. We provide these examples to illustrate what we are looking for in studying the degree to which CQE programs are implemented in accordance with original legislative intent and primary program goals.

We provide these examples of how other programs sometimes depart from their initial program designs to underscore the exemplary nature of CQE program implementation in this instance. For in our experience with demonstration projects, it is unusual to find programs where implementation so closely follows intent, and where program implementation has been so thorough, so intense, and so successful. This is <u>our interpretation</u> of what we saw and heard. The data now follow for reader interpretation.

*Statement of CQE purpose quoted from the official CQE Early Childhood and Family Education Programs brochure, "Beginnings," January, 1977.

The Basic Thrust of the CQE Program

In twelve of the thirteen programs parent education is clearly the primary focus of program activity. The one exception is the new White Bear Lake "Cooperative Neighborhood Preschool Education Center" program (only a few months old) which operates a daily nursery school for children of single parent, low income, apartment dwellers. In all other programs, the child-care component is a means of accomplishing the parent education objective. The primary target of these programs is the parent; the basic thrust of program activities is parent education and involvement.

The most important mechanism for educating parents is some form of parent group activity at the program center. The other major method of reaching parents is home visitation wherein program staff go to the home for one-to-one interaction. Only one program (Minneapolis "Very Important People - Home Base") has no parent group, in-center component. Four programs, however, report no real home visitation component, though a staff member may make an occasional home visit for a special purpose. Eight programs report having both in-center parent groups and one-to-one home visitation components. Of these eight programs, interview respondents generally agree that the center-based programs are most important. The Directors of all eight programs identified the center-based parent program as the most important component at their site. Thus, of thirteen local programs, eleven identify the center-based parent group activity as their most important component; one program has only the parent home visitation component and one program emphasizes center-based child-care as the most important component.

It is important to note that in some instances there is not complete agreement among all respondents at a site. Several teachers serving on Advisory Committees and program staff responsible for center-based child-care

identified the child-care component as most important. Some home visitation staff identified the home visit component as most important. In other instances staff and non-staff respondents said that it was inappropriate or impossible to rank either parent education or child-care as most important because the two activities take place simultaneously and are totally interdependent. However, in no case was there any evidence that these differences represented sources of real staff conflict or that there was any ambiguity about what activities ought to be taking place in the program. Rather, these were differences in emphasis created by a forced-choice interview situation where, forced to choose A or B, respondents may well choose as most important that aspect of the program in which they are most directly involved.

The interview data and site observations indicate that there is substantial agreement among staff and participants at each site about what the program ought to do and what it actually does. It is unusual, in our experience, to find an effort involving this many sites and this many people that is so free of staff conflict. It is quite easy in open-ended interviews of this type, and with the questions we asked, for respondents to toss out little innuendoes about the lack of competency or cloudy thinking of other staff. In these interviews quite the opposite occurred. Respondents, both staff and non-staff, made a point of complimenting staff, emphasizing close cooperation among staff, and reporting displays of mutual respect among staff, both publicly and privately.

There is, then, substantial consensus about the basic thrust of these CQE programs and general agreement about what to do to translate intent into program activities. We would add that, based on our discussions with staff and our observations of program activities, this fundamental unity of direction appears to be nurtured by a manifest enthusiasm for the task at hand.

Staff competency and enthusiasm shall be described at greater length later in this report. We turn now to a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of each of the components as perceived by the eighty interview respondents. The analysis begins with that component identified most often as being of greatest importance: the center-based parent groups.

Center-Based Parent Education

There is considerable variation in the details of how center-based parent education is implemented in the different sites. For example, one site has a relatively formal fourteen week course for parents; when they sign up for the sequence parents are asked to make a strong commitment to attend regularly and only parents who participate in parent education can avail themselves of other program services like the materials library, child-care, or EPS coordination. Other programs have year-long discussion groups that meet at regularly scheduled times but are available on a "come-if-you-want-to" or "come-if-you-can" basis; parents are not asked to make a commitment to be present for discussions. Some sites place more emphasis on formal presentations of information; other sites emphasize open-ended parent discussion groups. Some programs structure time for parents and children to be together as part of the parent education program; at other locations the parent classes are entirely separate from child-care activities.

Several sites offer combinations of most or all of these approaches. The observations section of this report describes these variations in detail. In this section we shall explore some of the strengths and weaknesses that have emerged in these types of programs in order to benefit from the cumulative experience of our eighty program informants.

Some clear patterns do emerge. It is important to keep in mind that these patterns emerge in response to completely open-ended questions.

Such questions generally pick up those responses that are most salient to interviewees at a particular point in time. Under the constraints of a limited interview only so much information can emerge. But what one person forgets, another mentions; and over the course of eighty interviews a fairly complete picture emerges. It is that picture we shall present here.

For staff this section of the interview begins by asking for a description of the parent education component. All program directors were asked questions in this section of the interview. Other staff were asked only about those components in which they were directly involved. Twenty-four of the forty staff interviewed (60%) responded to questions in this section. Having described the activities for parents in the center, each respondent was asked: "What do you feel are the strengths and weaknesses of the center-based programs for parents?" Table I shows the results of a content analysis of responses to this question.

The most frequent response concerned the mutual support nature of parent groups. Other frequently mentioned strengths focused on parents making friends, creating a sense of community, reducing isolation; parents teaching each other and learning from each other; parents getting needed information about child development; and staff interacting with parents as equals.

What emerges here is a picture of highly interactive discussion sessions where the process and group dynamics are the key to impacting on parents. Parents find out that their problems and concerns are not unique; they get their feelings and frustrations out in the open; they find out they're not alone. The discussions are aimed at stimulating reflection; sharing ideas and identifying common problems. Parents are not given the right answer or the one best approach to parenting. They

TABLE I-A

Staff Responses Concerning Strengths of
Center-Based Parent Education Programs
(Twenty-four Staff Respondents)

| | |
|---|---|
| Parents provide mutual support, empathy for each other | 15 |
| Having children and parents in school together | 9 |
| Parents make friends, create a sense of community, reduce isolation | 6 |
| Parents teach each other | 6 |
| Parents get information about child development, learn new ideas, learn what is happening to their children | 6 |
| Staff and parents interact as equals, no status differentiation, staff are learners too | 5 |
| Staff are competent and caring | 5 |
| Staff have both individual and group contact with parents | 4 |
| Flexible curriculum | 3 |
| Informality of programs, comfortable environment for parents | 3 |
| Confidentiality maintained for parents | 3 |
| Providing child care so parents can attend | 2 |
| Parents observe other children of other ages at the Center | 2 |
| More and more parents coming all the time | 2 |

(Nineteen strengths mentioned once: Parents gain an extended family our culture has lost; variety of programs offered; flexible scheduling; outreach success; emphasis on strengthening the family unit; parent enthusiasm; Advisory Council involvement; support of local school administration; parents observe other parenting styles; length of discussion-2 hours; staff were formerly parent participants; continuity of parent participation; makes school a resource to parents; cheaper than home-based; parents getting specific skills; breaking down fathers' sex role; use of videotape; parents of same-aged children together; and carry-over from Center to home.)

TABLE I-B

Staff Responses Concerning Weaknesses of
Center-Based Parent Education Programs
(Twenty-four Staff Respondents)

| | |
|---|---|
| Need to get to more parents | 6 |
| Lack of transportation for mothers | 5 |
| Space/facility limitations | 5 |
| Not reaching fathers | 3 |
| Not enough time to do all that's needed | 3 |
| Short on staff | 2 |
| May not be reaching people with the most need | 2 |

(Seventeen weaknesses mentioned once: Not reaching minorities; attendance area restrictions; CQE requirement to have 10 people registered to begin classes limits special classes, e.g., for single parent families; don't feel welcome in the school; need a place for siblings of children in the program with parents; gossip; parents making value judgments about each other; need for carryover from Center to homes; poor continuity between sessions; some weak materials; need more parent-child interaction; some people can't be reached this way, need home visits; poor parent motivation; inexperienced staff; children act up around their parents; parents look for easy answers, want staff to be experts; and parent education should be more task-oriented.)

TABLE I-C

Staff Evaluation:
How effective is Center-based family
education in attaining its goals?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| very effective | 20 | (83%) |
| somewhat effective | 3 | (13%) |
| not too effective | 1 | ( 4%) |
| not at all effective | 0 | ( 0%) |
| Total | 24 | (100%) |

TABLE II-A

Staff Responses Concerning Strengths of
Center-Based Programs for Children
(Twenty-one Staff Respondents)

| | |
|---|---|
| Children get to interact with other children, benefit from being in a group of kids | 7 |
| Gradually orienting children to school with parents, merging child into school, getting used to school, reducing separation anxiety | 6 |
| Gets parents actively interacting with their child one-to-one in a positive way | 6 |
| Makes children feel important | 4 |
| Variety of things for children to do | 4 |
| Children begin to learn proper school behaviors (e.g., sitting quietly at times, sharing) | 4 |
| Children have fun | 3 |
| Children get attention and activities that parents can't/don't provide | 3 |
| Way of getting parents to come because they want the child part | 2 |

(Twelve strengths mentioned once: Highly competent staff; good facility; good materials; staff cooperation; staff-parent cooperation; the children are the strength; availability of materials not present in homes; individualized; best setting for really discerning early problems to get early intervention; very specific behavioral goals for children; parent volunteers; kids exposed to different parenting models; an observation window.)

TABLE II-B

Staff Responses Concerning Weaknesses of
Center-Based Programs for Children
(Twenty-one Staff Respondents)

| | |
|---|---|
| Lack of space/poor facility | 4 |
| Short amount of time with children | 3 |
| Lacks continuity for children | 2 |
| Transportation | 2 |
| Parents tend to see as daycare, don't fully understand | 2 |
| Need more staff | 2 |

(Ten weaknesses mentioned once: Scheduling is for parent convenience, not children; limited attendance area; sexist books; lack of child-care for siblings; evaluation lacking; children's teacher isn't comfortable with parents in the room; lack of funds to serve everyone; poor parent involvement; too few field trips; children misbehave around parents.)

TABLE II-C

Staff Evaluation:
How effective is the Center-based program
for children in attaining its goals?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| very effective | 16 | (76%) |
| somewhat effective | 5 | (24%) |
| not too effective | 0 | |
| not all effective | 0 | |
| Total | 21 | (100%) |

TABLE III-A

Staff Responses Concerning Strengths of the Home Visit Component

| | |
|---|---|
| Gives mother personal support, reinforcement, help, counseling where she wouldn't get it otherwise | 10 |
| Gets new ideas and information to mothers who wouldn't otherwise be reached | 5 |
| On a one-to-one basis, staff-to-child, staff-to-parent | 4 |
| Can match materials and activities directly to a specific home | 4 |
| Brings stimulation to homes where there is little stimulation (especially in rural areas) | 3 |
| Meets parents on their own turf, non-threatening environment for parents | 3 |
| Home is secure, non-threatening environment for child, so child learns easily | 2 |
| Gives staff a chance to see both mother and child in their natural living environment | 2 |
| Reaches rural parents who can't/won't come to center-based activities | 2 |
| Best way of really reaching people | 2 |

(Nine strengths mentioned once: Keeps child home as long as possible; gets other family members involved, especially fathers; gives parent a positive initial contact with school; brings to home things they can't afford; the ideal interaction; lets mother see child through another's eyes; facilitates contact with Center program; well-planned visits; and convenient for parents.)

TABLE III-B

Staff Responses Concerning Weaknesses of
the Home Visit Component
(Thirteen Staff Respondents)

| | |
|---|---|
| Scheduling difficulties (many have no phones) | 3 |
| Not enough time to get to parents every week | 2 |
| Need to reach more parents | 2 |
| Cost | 2 |
| Need more time in home | 2 |
| Sometimes difficult to talk to mother uninterrupted | 2 |

(Six weaknesses mentioned once: Difficult if two children present; need more planning time; parents become dependent; some people embarrassed by their home; and home is confused space.)

TABLE III-C

Staff Evaluation:
How effective is the home visit program?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| very effective | 11 | (85%) |
| somewhat effective | 2 | (15%) |
| not too effective | 0 | |
| not at all effective | 0 | |
| Total | 13 | (100%) |

learn that they are part of a common struggle to be "good parents," and that there are no absolute truths, no complete set of directions, but at the same time, they don't have to struggle alone. Others are on the road with them. (Direct observations of parent sessions support and reinforce this process-oriented motif.)

Out of this process, staff believe, the participants become better parents. Eighty-three percent of the staff interviewed (20 of 24) in this section rated the center-based parent program as "very effective" in attaining its goals; three rated their program "somewhat effective" and one program was rated "not too effective." To support these ratings staff report that parent attendance is generally good this year; parents tell staff they like the sessions and they're changing because of them.

Relatively few weaknesses were identified compared to the list of strengths. A fourth of the staff respondents are concerned that the program isn't reaching as many parents as they'd like it to, though it is clear that their standards are high, and they'd like to reach all parents. Lack of transportation for mothers to center activities and space/facility limitations are the only other major weaknesses identified.

While the center-based parent program can be separated from other program components for analytical purposes, in practice it is closely tied to center-based child-care programs. In several programs the children are observed as part of the parent education experience; in others parents spend time learning activities with children; and in most programs the parent discussions could not occur at all if some provision were not made for the care of the children. With this perspective in mind, then, we turn to a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the center-based child component.

Center-Based Programs for Children

The center-based programs for children provide supervised play and learning activities. Most center activity time is free-flowing and relatively unstructured, though sites vary somewhat on the types of activities offered and the age groups served. Questions about this component were addressed only to program directors and staff respondents directly involved in the child-care component; twenty-one staff were interviewed about the strengths and weaknesses of the children's programs. Table II displays the results.

The major pattern that emerges in these comments concerns assisting children (and parents) in making the transition from the individual parent-child relationship of the home to the group-oriented situation of school. Many of the participants are young parents whose children have no siblings and few opportunities for group play. More generally, children get used to being at school, or being in a new place, where they can gradually become more independent of "mommy's constant presence." At the same time parents are nearby if needed, a fact which appears to reduce separation anxiety in both parent and child. Strongly reinforcing this motif of assisting the transition from home to school is the fact that the second most frequently mentioned strength of center-based parent programs (Table I-A) was "having children and parents in school together;" thirty-eight percent mentioned this strength. This finding will emerge as important again later when we discuss non-staff perceptions of these programs and overall patterns of responses with regard to program justification.

No really consistent weaknesses emerged for this component. On the whole, staff respondents feel quite good about the center-based children's component. Three-fourths rated this component "very effective:" the remaining one-fourth saw this component as "somewhat effective."

Home Visits to Parents and Children

The high cost of home visits given the number of parents who can be reached by each staff member has limited the degree to which this component has been implemented. Four programs essentially have no home visitation component. Several others have only a limited home visitation effort. Only one program is entirely based on home visits. Given the more limited implementation of this component across programs, there were fewer staff interviews (thirteen) about the strengths and weaknesses of home visits. The results are listed in Table III.

Two themes emerge with regard to the home visitation component: (1) reaching parents who can't or won't come to center-based activities and thus would be neglected without a home visit; and (2) the highly personalized and individualized nature of home visits. Eighty-five percent of the respondents feel that this component is "very effective." Staff say that mothers really appreciate the visits. Staff also report that over time they frequently notice real changes in both parent and child. The weaknesses mentioned involve primarily the practical difficulties of implementing a home visit program: scheduling, time, and cost.

The Interdependence of the Parts

The three components we have discussed fit together to form a comprehensive effort in several programs. Center-based parent programs are almost completely interdependent with center-based children's activities at most sites. Home visits are aimed at those parents who are not reached by center-based programs.

The interviews reveal that the other three program components are highly complementary to and interdependent with these first three more primary components, i.e., the library loans of toys and educational

materials, the health screening and referral component, and the adolescent oriented component are supportive of the basic parent education effort. None of these latter three components stand alone.

The major variation among programs in the library component concerns who is eligible to participate. Some sites restrict participation to those families involved in the more formal parent/child education sessions; other sites, particularly the rural sites, have a less restricted participation policy, essentially opening the library loans of toys and other materials to any families who want to participate.

The major strengths mentioned with regard to the library component were that (1) the toys and learning materials for children provide variety for children that they couldn't otherwise have; (2) this component serves as a means of getting parents initially involved so that they can become familiar with the larger education effort, i.e., it serves as an entré to the full program; and (3) children learn to share things that don't belong to them and learn to take care of things that don't belong to them. Staff report that parents are particularly enthusiastic about the library program. Sixty-five percent rated this component "very effective." (See Table IV.)

Table V shows the criteria program staff use in selecting children's items for the library. The results show a clear orientation to both practical and educational concerns.

The health screening component manifests perhaps more structural variation across sites than any other component. Some sites do health screening themselves; others refer health screening entirely to the county; some do one part of it themselves (the Denver Developmental test); and still others combine these approaches depending on the situation and parent involved. This component is of relatively minor importance

TABLE IV

Staff Evaluation:
Effectiveness of Three Components

A. How effective is the library loans of learning materials in attaining its goals?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| very effective | 11 | (65%) |
| somewhat effective | 5 | (29%) |
| not too effective | 1 | ( 6%) |
| not at all effective | 0 | |
| Total | 17 | (100%) |

B. How effective is the health screening and referral component in attaining its goals?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| very effective | 7 | (44%) |
| somewhat effective | 7 | (44%) |
| not too effective | 2 | (12%) |
| not at all effective | 0 | |
| Total | 16 | (100%) |

C. How effective is the adolescent component in attaining its goals?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| very effective | 0 | |
| somewhat effective | 5 | (83%) |
| not too effective | 1 | (17%) |
| not at all effective | 0 | |
| Total | 6 | (100%) |

TABLE V

Criteria Mentioned as Used in Selection of Children's Items for Library Loans

| | |
|---|---|
| Durability | 14 |
| Educational/developmental potential | 11 |
| Versatility, things that can be used in a variety of creative ways | 8 |
| Can be used by children of different ages | 6 |
| Things not available commercially in stores | 5 |
| Non-sexist | 5 |
| Attractive | 4 |
| Fun and interesting | 3 |
| Safe | 3 |
| Things parents can afford to buy | 3 |
| Age appropriateness | 3 |
| Non-racist | 3 |

(Five criteria mentioned once: Relevant to target population; easy to use; things that can be reproduced or purchased locally; practical; and avoid things with too many pieces.)

in most programs, largely because it is not unique to the program. Only a couple of programs have attempted to integrate EPS with their parent education effort in any real way. Fewer than half of the staff respondents rated this component as "very effective." (See Table IV.)

The sixth and final component, adolescent participation and pre-parenting education, is scarcely implemented at all. Only four of the thirteen sites are doing anything at all on this component, mostly a volunteer child-care assistance opportunity for adolescents and a few parenting or child development classes slipped into a high school health or home economics course. No staff respondent rated this component "very effective" though five gave it a "somewhat effective" rating. (See Table IV.) Several programs have hopes and schemes for improving this component but it is clearly viewed as marginal to the overall program.

The weakness of the adolescent component reinforces the point with which we began; namely, the CQE program is clearly focused on parent education. Those components directly aimed at having an impact on parents have been fully and effectively implemented. Those components viewed by staff as more marginal to their primary task of parent education play a relatively minor role in the overall program.

## PROGRAM STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES: THE NON-STAFF VIEW

The data reported thus far are from interviews with staff. At each site we also interviewed two local Advisory Board members and one school official knowledgeable about the program. These interviews were more general than staff interviews since respondents were usually not familiar with day-to-day program operations. Rather than seeking information about each component separately, these forty respondents were asked about overall strengths and weaknesses. These forty non-staff respondents consist of the following persons:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Parent Advisory Board Members | 15 | (38%) |
| 2. | School Principals | 6 | (15%) |
| 3. | Advisory Board representatives from local community organizations and agencies | 6 | (15%) |
| 4. | School Administrative Staff (Director of Elementary Education, Director of Instructional Support Services, etc.) | 5 | (12%) |
| 5. | Kindergarten and primary school teachers on the Advisory Board | 5 | (12%) |
| 6. | Superintendents | 2 | ( 5%) |
| 7. | School Board Member | 1 | ( 3%) |
| | Total Non-Staff Interviews | 40 | (100%) |

Table VI lists the major program strengths and weaknesses identified in these interviews. Given the fact that these are responses to an entirely open-ended question, the pattern of answers is quite striking. First a brief quantitative analysis of the comments.

Table VI-A

Program Strengths Mentioned by
Non-Staff Advisory Board Members

Parent Aspects of the Programs

| | |
|---|---|
| High parent input, involvement, participation in determining content | 13 |
| Parents share problems/perspectives with each other, learn from each other, support each other, broaden horizons | 11 |
| Parenting skills, child development curriculum and program content is good | 8 |
| Improves parent-child relationships | 8 |
| Helps parents establish good school relationship, involvement with schools in a positive way | 7 |
| Makes good variety of new and good materials available to parents | 6 |
| Brings together people who otherwise wouldn't get to know each other, reduces isolation | 6 |
| It's getting to people who need it | 3 |
| Strengthens and solidifies families | 2 |
| Program philosophy: new ideas and mutual sharing, not dogma | 2 |
| Parent enthusiasm | 2 |
| Parents can observe their kids with other kids | 2 |

(Nine strengths mentioned once: individual parent counseling; that the middle class can participate--not just for poor; good facility for parent discussions; teacher provides a model for parents; unique type of program--not available elsewhere; parents feel better about parenting; gets fathers involved; parent participation has been increasing; and toymaking by parents.)

Child Aspects of the Program

| | |
|---|---|
| Children generally benefiting, learning, being stimulated | 12 |

Table VI-A Continued

Table VI-A (CONTINUED)

| | |
|---|---|
| Child Aspects of the Program, continued | |
| Makes children feel important, builds self-esteem | 6 |
| Gradually and positively merging child into schools (without sudden trauma or separation anxiety) | 6 |
| Children sharing, interacting with each other | 4 |
| Academic preparation for Kindergarten | 2 |
| (Three strengths mentioned once: field trips, parent volunteers, and stimulates child in his home environment.) | |
| Staff Aspects of the Program | |
| Highly competent, good staff | 15 |
| Good staff-parent rapport and interaction | 8 |
| Staff work together well | 2 |
| Good staff planning | 2 |
| Miscellaneous Strengths | |
| Program well-accepted in the community | 4 |
| Individualized health care | 4 |
| Good public relations for school district, makes school part of the community | 3 |
| (Four strengths mentioned once: varied program activities; newsletter; good cooperation with social agencies; and good involvement of high school students.) | |

Table VI-B

Program Weaknesses Mentioned by
Non-Staff Advisory Board Members

| | |
|---|---|
| Reaching as many parents as need the program | 10 |
| Space, facility problems | 6 |
| Need more staff | 4 |
| Making parents understand what the program really is | 3 |
| Getting to parents who most need it | 2 |

(Fourteen weaknesses mentioned once: transportation; limited attendance area; more effective with children than with parents; funding uncertainty; confidentiality; costly; five day program too much for 3-5 year olds; meeting attendance; large area to serve geographically; not well integrated into schools; mothers become dependent on the program instead of dealing with their husbands; stigma like welfare; not reaching fathers well; and insufficient funding.)

Table VI-C

Non-Staff Overall Evaluation:
How Effective is the Program in Attaining Its Goals?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Very effective | 35 | (88%) |
| Somewhat effective | 4 | (10%) |
| Not too effective | 0 | |
| Not at all effective | 0 | |
| (Can't rate) | 1 | ( 2%) |
| | 40 | (100%) |

Table VI lists 193 comments; eighty percent (154) of these concern program strengths. Of the 154 strengths mentioned, four categories emerge as follows:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Parent component strengths | 79 comments | (51%) |
| Child component strengths | 33 comments | (21%) |
| Staffing strengths | 18 comments | (18%) |
| Miscellaneous items | 10 comments | (10%) |
| Total Strengths | 154 comments | (100%) |

This overview of the content analysis permits, in our judgment, two major conclusions: (1) These respondents clearly view these programs as parent-oriented education programs, thus reinforcing our earlier conclusion that programs are being implemented in accordance with legislative intent; and (2) these respondents clearly perceive program strengths as far outweighing program weaknesses. This latter conclusion is supported by the overall non-staff evaluations of program effectiveness (Table VI-C). Eighty-eight percent of the non-staff respondents rated the programs as "very effective" in attaining their goals.

With regard to the qualitative content of non-staff comments, the patterns are very similar to staff comments: primary emphasis on the importance of parent input, mutual support in parent groups, sharing rather than indoctrinating, and a fundamental focus on improved parenting skills, better parent-child relationships, and integration of parents into the schools. Staff are given high marks for competency and rapport with parents. The only pattern that emerges among the weaknesses mentioned is the desire to reach more parents and the problems that limit the effectiveness of outreach

efforts (making parents understand the program, getting to those who need it most, transportation problems, attendance area restrictions, large geographical area to serve, not reaching fathers, and a welfare-type stigma attached to the program).

Advisory Board Implementation

Since these non-staff respondents represent the views of Advisory Board members it is worth considering the basis for their judgments about the program. The establishment of local Advisory Boards is a program mandate. The idea of local citizen Advisory Boards has become a popular governmental mechanism aimed at ensuring local control and accountability. In health, education, social action, and education advisory boards have become commonplace. The issue here is whether or not this aspect of the program has actually been implemented in accordance with legislative intent.

The evidence from both staff and non-staff (Advisory Board member) interviews is that Advisory Boards are playing a meaningful role in these programs. The Advisory Boards are described most often as a "sounding board" for staff ideas. They often play an important role in outreach efforts and in defining the relationship to local school districts. In several programs the Advisory Boards have become the focus for local lobbying efforts aimed at persuading state legislators to continue program funding. In no case were there reports that staff members controlled or manipulated Boards. Quite the contrary, staff members said they welcomed Board input and assistance. Several non-staff noted that they really had little need to supervise programs closely because the staff were so competent. This left a few respondents feeling like they were still struggling with the

issue of how to really be of assistance to the program.

Two questions provide an overview of Advisory Board activity. Staff and non-staff responses are combined.

1. How would you describe the Advisory Board input into the program? Would you say the Advisory Board is:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Very involved in the program | 29 | (46%) |
| Fairly involved | 33 | (52%) |
| Not too involved | 1 | ( 2%) |
| Not at all involved in any real way | 0 | |

Total: 63 (No response = 17 or 21% of 80 total respondents)

2. Do you think the Advisory Board should be

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| More involved and active | 28 | (45%) |
| Less involved | 0 | |
| Remain as it is | 34 | (55%) |

Total: 62 (No response = 18 or 23% of 80 total respondents)

Given the degree to which Advisory Boards are at least "fairly involved" in local programs, the comments and perceptions of non-staff respondents can be taken seriously as, on the whole, relatively knowledgeable reactions. As noted in the last section, the reactions of non-staff respondents are quite positive with eighty-eight percent of the respondents rating the programs as "very effective" in attaining their goals.

## PROGRAM OUTREACH

The major program weakness noted in last year's internal evaluation report was the relative ineffectiveness of program outreach efforts. There was concern that not enough parents were being reached to make programs cost-effective.

Program outreach continues to be a major concern of our interview

respondents. In both staff responses (Table I-B) and non-staff responses (Table VI-B) the need to reach more parents heads the list of weaknesses mentioned. However, the interviews contain a separate, more detailed section on program outreach that places this problem in a somewhat different light.

Two issues are in question here: (1) Are programs reaching a sufficient number of parents to justify their existence? (2) Are programs reaching the "right" parents, the "parents who really need the program"? It is not possible to answer these questions in any definitive way because the definition of what constitutes an "adequate" number of parents reached is a matter of opinion, as is the issue of who <u>really</u> needs the program most (everyone? the poor? single parent families? fathers? by definition, <u>anyone</u> who doesn't participate?).

All interview respondents were asked to describe program outreach efforts. Various programs are trying a variety of outreach methods: newsletters, personal contacts (door-to-door, telephone, referrals), informal coffee hours, brochures, open meetings, newspapers, intensive door-to-door canvassing campaigns, and mail surveys. A few programs appear to be employing all these methods to some extent. However, when asked to identify the <u>one</u> outreach method that is <u>most effective</u> the predominant response by far was "word of mouth from parent-to-parent." The second most effective method is the newsletter, followed by "door knocking" and informal coffees.

Respondents were then asked to rate the effectiveness of program outreach efforts this year:

Would you say the program's outreach efforts are:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Highly effective | 37 | (57%) |
| Somewhat effective | 26 | (40%) |
| Not too effective | 2 | ( 3%) |
| Not at all effective | 0 | |
| | 65 | (100%) |

(No responses = 15, or 19% of 80 total interviewees)

While there is room for improvement, these data indicate that, overall, respondents feel that they are effectively reaching parents.

Respondents were then asked two interrelated questions:

Which people in the community are you reaching most effectively?

Which people in the community are you reaching least effectively?

Almost no patterns emerged from these questions. The responses for those parents reached effectively spans twenty-two categories with only two categories mentioned as often as four times ("high school educated" and "non-working mothers"). Patterns were somewhat more distinct for the second question. Twenty-six different types of parents being missed were identified: four categories were mentioned by more than three people: fathers not being reached (7 respondents); single parents (6); poor families (6); and families where both parents work are not reached effectively according to five respondents.

Respondents were next asked:

In light of your overall purpose, how well do you think you have been able to reach the people you are trying to reach?

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Very well | 29 | (45%) | |
| Fairly well | 34 | (53%) | |
| Not too well | 1 | ( 2%) | |
| Not at all well | 0 | | |
| | 64 | (100%) | (16 non-respondents) |

Taken all together this data is somewhat difficult to interpret. Interviewers reported that respondents generally had difficulty with the questions on which types of parents were and were not reached effectively. Many were clearly guessing or speculating. The broad range of categories listed leads us to two comments. First, different programs are serving different target populations, a point that emerges quite clearly in the descriptions of the individual programs contained in a later section of this report. The thirteen CQE programs span rural counties, inner city neighborhoods, suburbs, and solid middle class communities. (In one such middle income community both Advisory Board parents made independent, but equally impassioned statements to the effect that "middle class people have a right to programs too, not just the poor or welfare people, but all taxpayers. I couldn't afford to pay for this program but I wouldn't qualify for Headstart. We all need advice--you tell that to the legislators in your report.") Thus, the diversity of responses stems in part from the diversity of programs.

The second reason, we believe, for the diversity of responses is that most programs don't really know who they're reaching--or the detailed make-up of their target populations. There are some clear exceptions, but overall we found little evidence to suggest that programs are collecting systematic information about the characteristics of either program participants or their larger target population.

Despite this last point, we find little to criticize in current program outreach efforts. There are, however, some lessons to be learned from the experiences of these programs in their outreach efforts. First,

and perhaps most important, outreach has to be viewed as a long-term process. Program after program reports that this is the year when things have really come together after two earlier years of considerable struggle. That struggle consisted of a gradual process of winning the trust, confidence, and respect of people in the community; a frustrating process of trying to explain what the program really is; and a staff development process whereby the program staff find out what works and what doesn't work in a particular community.

The importance of a long-term view of outreach is strongly indicated by the answer to the question concerning which method of outreach is most effective. By far the dominant response was "word of mouth parent-to-parent." Clearly a program has to have existed long enough to "graduate" a few parent alumni before "word of mouth parent-to-parent" can even become a recruitment/outreach method.

Finally, we suspect that much of the concern displayed about outreach comes from two sources: First, a real felt-need to have impressive numbers to flash before funders to demonstrate effectiveness and justify continued financial support; and secondly, an almost missionary zeal among some staff and parent alumni that their mission will not be accomplished until every parent has been through the program. Expectations in such cases go beyond what is possible or, perhaps, even desirable.

We do not mean to demean these program outreach efforts. Quite the contrary, these programs provide striking evidence of the effectiveness of long-term, intensive outreach processes. We would only add the cautionary note that more than one program has suffered because it began to focus more

attention on quantity than quality. The "word of mouth parent-to-parent" outreach method means that providing a quality service is the most effective long-term approach to outreach.

## OPERATIONAL ISSUES

In order to operate, local programs need space and facilities. Most programs have space in schools. Two-thirds of the respondents reported that finding space for the program was a problem. They were then asked:

Would you say the program facilities are . . .

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| More than adequate | 9 | (15%) |
| Adequate, or | 33 | (54%) |
| Less than adequate | 19 | (31%) |
| | 61 | (100%) |

To some extent, space problems are inherent in pilot projects where both year-to-year and long-term funding are uncertain.

Sites vary on the nature of their relationship to local school districts. Respondents generally felt that a positive working relationship had been established between the early childhood/family education and the local school district. Two questions were asked in this regard:

How interested do you feel school personnel are in the program? Would you say they are . . .

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Very interested | 25 | (41%) |
| Somewhat interested | 28 | (46%) |
| Not too interested | 7 | (11%) |
| Not at all interested | 1 | ( 2%) |
| | 61 | (100%) |

Okay, now we'd like to get at the relationship to the schools another way. Would you describe the relationship between the early education program and the school district personnel as . . .

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Very cooperative | 40 | (69%) |
| Somewhat cooperative | 17 | (29%) |
| Somewhat uncooperative | 1 | ( 2%) |
| Very uncooperative | 0 | |
| | 58 | (100%) |

Respondents are considerably more positive about the programs' relationship to other social service agencies.

> To what extent is it important for the early childhood/family education program to have a close relationship to other social service agencies in the community?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Very important | 53 | (90%) |
| Somewhat important | 6 | (10%) |
| Not too important, or | 0 | |
| Not at all important. | 0 | |
| | 59 | (100%) |

> Would you say other social service agencies are generally . . .

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Very cooperative | 43 | (84%) |
| Somewhat cooperative | 8 | (16%) |
| Somewhat uncooperative | 0 | |
| Very uncooperative | 0 | |
| | 51 | (100%) |

Staffing Early Childhood/Family Education Programs

The data reported earlier on program strengths and weaknesses indicated that staffing is a major area of strength across programs. Parent interviews and our direct observations support the conclusion reached about staff in the 1976 CQE evaluation report:

> The factor most contributing to the success of the program is the qualification of staff persons. For the large part, the program staff have exerted extraordinary efforts to implement and enrich the programs.

Thirty-three respondents (65%) reported no problem finding qualified staff; eighteen respondents (35%) said they had experienced some difficulty finding staff. When asked, "What recommendations would you make about the competencies staff should have for early childhood/family education programs?", most respondents warned against looking only at formal credentials and certificates. Such immeasurables as "caring about children," "relating well

to parents," and "organizing ability" were emphasized as critical characteristics of successful staff. Respondents also felt that staff should be learners as well as teachers. They would like more sharing among staff from different sites and continuing opportunities for in-service training.

How much need is there for in-service training of staff? Would you say there is . . .

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Very great need | 21 | (36%) |
| Somewhat of a need | 24 | (41%) |
| Not too much need, or | 11 | (19%) |
| No real need. | 2 | ( 4%) |
| | 58 | (100%) |

Several staff commented that CQE-sponsored workshops had notably improved this year as greater opportunities for sharing and interacting were provided. They also commented on the competency and helpfulness of the current CQE program coordinator.

The in-service question was followed by asking how local program staff are evaluated. The results were as follows:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Formal (written) evaluations of staff are done | 9 | (17%) |
| Informal evaluations (interpersonal comments) | 31 | (57%) |
| No evaluations formal or informal | 6 | (11%) |
| Don't know | 8 | (15%) |
| | 54 | (100%) |

## EVIDENCE OF PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

While staff appear to find informal, personal evaluations sufficient for their immediate needs, such evaluations of program impact are not useable in the long-run. After asking respondents to rate program effectiveness

they were asked:

> If you were going to try to prove to someone that your rating of program effectiveness was accurate, what evidence would you use?

Tables VII(A-B-C) and Table VIII categorize responses to these questions for staff and non-staff. Almost all the "evidence" is of the impressionistic, hearsay variety. These data suggest that parents are reacting quite positively and that both staff and non-staff respondents have observed what they believe to be meaningful program effects. They have not, however, with a few exceptions, established procedures to systematically collect information about program effects. Follow-up questionnaires to parents would represent, in our opinion, a minimal evaluation procedure that could contribute substantially to local evaluation efforts. As near as we can tell only three sites currently use any formal follow-up techniques for program evaluation.

The other major source of evaluation data that could be tapped systematically and formally is the observations of Kindergarten teachers. At three sites Kindergarten teachers made special efforts to seek out the site visitors in support of the program. The Kindergarten teacher at Dayton's Bluff specifically asked to be quoted in this report. Her comment:

> I've been a public school teacher for twenty-five years. I've been involved in a lot of special programs. I've seen them come and go. This is the best new program I've seen in twenty-five years of teaching.
>
> I can see differences in the children who are in this program. The mothers walk by my class with their children when they come for the program. It's fantastic. They're getting used to school. They're learning. I get these kids in my class and I can see the effects. They've needed this for a long time. They've got to keep this program.

Another Kindergarten teacher who serves on the Advisory Board of the

Table VII-A

Staff Evidence for Effectiveness of
Center-Based Parent Component
(Twenty-four staff respondents)

| | |
|---|---|
| Impressions based on fact that parents attend sessions and tell us they like to come | 23 |
| Parent responses on questionnaires | 7 |
| Kindergarten and other teachers report observing positive effects | 7 |
| Direct observations by staff of behavioral changes in parents | 5 |
| Waiting lists are evidence of effectiveness | 3 |
| Parents lobbying to legislature because they want to keep the program | 3 |
| Feedback to us from community agency people | 2 |

Table VII-B

Staff Evidence for Effectiveness of
Center-Based Children's Programs
(Twenty-one staff respondents)

| | |
|---|---|
| Parent informal, verbal support/comments | 10 |
| What children say and do | 6 |
| Attendance, parents keep bringing their kids | 5 |
| Changes observed by staff in children | 5 |
| Parents refer other parents | 3 |
| Kindergarten teachers say they can tell real differences in children who've been in early childhood program | 3 |
| Waiting list | 3 |
| Gut level feelings | 1 |

Table VII-C

Staff Evidence for Effectiveness of
Home Visits Component
(Thirteen staff respondents)

| | |
|---|---|
| Mothers tell us the visits have led to changes in their children | 7 |
| Parents keep wanting home visits, express appreciation to us | 6 |
| Staff observed changes in parents and children over time | 6 |
| Questionnaires from parents | 3 |
| Children's comments | 1 |

Table VIII

Advisory Board and School Officials
Evidence for Program Effectiveness
(Forty respondents)

| | |
|---|---|
| Parent attendance: parents come, attendance is good, therefore program is effective | 18 |
| Parents' informal comments, what parents say about the program ("They say they like it") | 13 |
| Observable parent enthusiasm, support, "joy" | 11 |
| What community people other than parents say about the program, e.g., social service personnel comments, health service reactions | 11 |
| Testimony from interviewee directly ("I know I've changed because of this program") | 6 |
| Kindergarten teachers report that they observe positive program effects in children | 5 |
| Testimony from principals about changes they see in children | 3 |
| People from other areas want the program | 2 |
| Formal evaluations of effects on children | 1 |
| Gut level feeling that it's good | 1 |
| Parents willing to fight for the program | 1 |

same program commented in her interview: "It's very easy to pick out children who have been in the program . . . Parents participate now with understanding. They've learned how to interact with their children. It shows in them and their child."

Such quotes, however, identify only global effects. What is lacking -- and would be particularly useful -- is specific, detailed description of changes in parents and in children. What are the observable differences--not generally, but specifically; not just that changes have occurred, but their nature, manifestation, duration, etc. There is potential for a wealth of data from parents, teachers, and children that would not only document the fact that the programs are effective, but would also help identify particular areas where effects are strong and lasting as well as gaps in program impact, areas in which the program is failing to have an impact.

This evaluation report essentially documents the belief on the part of staff, Advisory Board members, school personnel, and parents that the program is having effects--important and meaningful effects. The next step is to systematically fill in the details, to carefully document the precise nature of program effects on both parents and children.

## PROGRAM JUSTIFICATION AND RATIONALE

The interviews tapped a great deal of strong feeling about early childhood/parent education programs. This section of the report addresses the relative priority of such programs in the larger context of educational needs and the ways in which respondents believe expenditures for such programs can be justified. What emerges here is a very broad consensus, a widely accepted set of beliefs about the nature of education, the nature of children, and the nature of contemporary society.

Two questions were asked of both staff and non-staff respondents to establish the relative priority of early childhood/family education programs. The first question:

> With the legislature being asked to fund many different educational programs, why should it fund early childhood/family education programs . . . or should it?
> Would you say . . .
>
> | | |
> |---|---|
> | Early education should be a high priority for funding | 95% |
> | Early education should be a medium priority for funding | 5% |
> | Early education should be a low priority for funding? | 0% |

The second question (asked directly only of non-staff) is more discriminatory because it breaks the "high priority" category into two parts.

> There are many demands made on legislators to fund a large variety of different educational programs. Given the problems in funding all education programs these days, how important should funding for early childhood and family education programs be? Would you say early childhood and family education should be considered . . .
>
> | | |
> |---|---|
> | A top priority for state funding | 63% |
> | Important but not a top priority | 30% |
> | A low priority but some funding, or | 7% |
> | Not important enough for any state funding. | 0% |

Almost without exception those who responded that these programs were "important but not a top priority" commented that they would oppose taking

money away from regular school programs, already operating under great financial duress, to fund any new programs. School administrators were particularly adamant on this point.

Given broad support for program funding, the question is why: How do respondents justify public expenditures for early childhood/family education programs? Several distinct but complementary arguments emerge in response to this issue.

1. The first five years are crucial. We must get to both parents and children during these critical formative years. Over half of all respondents specifically mentioned this argument. Different people phrased the issue in different ways, but the essential thrust was clear.

   A Kindergarten teacher: "You can't do page two until you do page one. If children get the proper attention early it will carry over."

   A school board member: "Our children are our biggest asset. If we can properly take care of them--from the day they're born, it starts immediately, not just when they get to school--they'll remain our chief asset. It all stems back to the early years in the home."

   A child-care staff member: "If a child has a successful first three years, he's going to make it."

2. The parent is the child's first and most important teacher. If you want to affect children you have to affect parents first. Over a third of the respondents mentioned this rationale.

   "Schools can have little effect if the home environment isn't supportive."

   "Parents hold the key to long-term effects in children."

3. Early childhood/parent education is a prevention program. Other programs try to "compensate" or "rehabilitate;" this program is preventing problems. A fourth of the respondents specifically used the word "prevention" in explaining their support for these programs. This argument is closely tied to the idea that the first five years are the crucial years developmentally. If problems don't develop then, schools won't have to spend large sums of money trying to deal with those problems.

4. Parenting doesn't come naturally; it's a skill that has to be learned--and that can be learned. A fourth of the respondents specifically mentioned this argument.

   "Parenting is the basics of life, but that basic function doesn't get educated for in our society."

   "Where else do you go to learn to be a parent?"

   "Smaller families, generation gaps, highly mobile families--the information on parenting is no longer handed down from generation to generation. The skills have to be learned some other way."

5. The isolation of people and families in modern society makes it necessary to find new ways for people to support each other in their basic life struggles. This argument is somewhat less focused than the preceding beliefs. Essentially this argument grows out of the earlier finding in this report that the major strength of the parent programs was the opportunity for parents to share and develop mutual support systems.

   "Ours is a transient community. People don't know each other. Their own parents live far away or are deceased. They have no one to talk to about what is happening with their child. Grandmother isn't there as part of an extended family. In small families children don't have sibling playmates. This program is saving both mother and children from almost complete social isolation--it's a life support system building a new sense of community among neighbors."

   "We have mothers whose only contact with the outside world is the parent educator during a home visit."

There were a large number of other reasons mentioned by different respondents, but these justifications seem to constitute the basic underlying belief system that cuts across the thirteen locations and unique program constellations. These beliefs are the mortar which hold these programs and their participants together.

## THE ROLE OF CQE

The final section in this analysis of the interviews addresses questions concerning the relationship between CQE and the local sites. Frequently the relationships between central funding sources and local sites are quite turbulent. For the most part this appears not to have been the case in this program.

There was only one common response to the question: "What would you say are the effects of being funded by CQE?" The answer: "We wouldn't be here otherwise." A few respondents felt that some CQE guidelines were too restrictive, but different people mentioned different guidelines; and others found the same guidelines helpful. The in-service workshops and current staff coordinator both drew praise from several respondents.

Overall, CQE is viewed as very helpful to local programs.

How would you describe the involvement of CQE in the program:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Very helpful | 32 | (62%) |
| Somewhat helpful | 18 | (35%) |
| Somewhat harmful | 2 | ( 3%) |
| Very harmful. | 0 | |
| | 52 | (100%) |

How do you feel about CQE staff involvement in the program? Would you like to see:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| More CQE staff involvement | 21 | (43%) |
| Less CQE staff involvement | 0 | |
| Maintain present involvement level | 28 | (57%) |
| | 49 | (100%) |

If CQE funding had not been available, do you think the program would have gotten started?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 6 | (12%) |
| No | 45 | (88%) |

What will happen to the program if or when CQE funding becomes unavailable?

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Program will end | 29 | (53%) |
| 2. | Struggle on at a much reduced level of operation | 22 | (40%) |
| 3. | Try to keep it going with minor reductions | 3 | ( 5%) |
| 4. | No change | 1 | ( 2%) |
| | | 55 | (100%) |

The respondents, including school officials, believe that these are valuable and effective programs. They agree that the need is substantial. They also agree that without state funding local school boards cannot and will not support these or any other new programs. In the view of program staff and participants the future of these programs is clearly in the hands of the state.

## THE PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE

Parent interviews were conducted by telephone with ten parents from each site. Parents were randomly selected from participation lists provided by program directors. Limitations of time and resources dictated the length and nature of these interviews. On parent rating of overall program quality we followed the same question format as that employed in the 1976 parent survey so that results would be comparable over the two years.

Table IX shows the overall results for the two years on the parent rating of program quality. The results are virtually identical. The results for individual program sites are also relatively stable. The Minneapolis V.I.P. program stands out as the only program receiving relatively low ratings both years. Given the very small samples for each site we would caution against making too much of the ratings for the individual sites. The overall program rating, however, is quite stable and probably quite representative.

Table X shows parent self-reports on the degree to which parents feel they have changed as a result of the program. Three-fourths (74%) of the parents report that they have changed either "a great deal" or "somewhat." The reader must determine to what extent this constitutes a measure of program effectiveness. In our judgment, and based on our experience with adult training programs in general, this constitutes considerable impact.

Table XI shows parents' views on the relative funding priority for

these programs. Just over half consider early childhood/family education a top priority. Ninety-four percent rate continued program funding by the state as either "important" or "tops" in priority. Again, this appears to us to indicate substantial parent support for these programs. Most reservations were similar to those noted earlier by Advisory Board members. Parents do not want to see money taken from public schools to fund these programs.

Parent comments about why they got involved in the program, and their assessments of program strengths and weaknesses parallel the earlier analysis of the site visit interviews. Parents emphasized the importance of sharing views with other parents; establishment of mutual support groups; learning about child development and parenting skills; providing social interaction and stimulation for their child; integrating the child into the school; and having access to toys, books, new ideas and health screening. Specific parent comments about each specific program are presented with the individual site observation descriptions to which we now turn.

Table IX

PARTICIPANT RATING OF PROGRAM QUALITY BY SITE IN 1976 and 1977

Question: How would you rate the quality of this program? If you were rating this program, what letter grade would you give it--using an A, B, C, D grading system?

Percentage of Persons Endorsing Each Rating in Each Year

| Program Location | A | | B | | C | | D | | No. Responding | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1976 | 1977 | 1976 | 1977 | 1976 | 1977 | 1976 | 1977 | 1976 | 1977 |
| Backus | 86% | 100% | 14% | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 10 |
| Bloomington | 42% | 70% | 50% | 30% | 8% | 0 | 0 | 0 | 12 | 10 |
| Lewiston | 56% | 78% | 22% | 22% | 22% | 0 | 0 | 0 | 9 | 9 |
| Mankato | 69% | 40% | 31% | 60% | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 13 | 10 |
| Mpls. Powderhorn | 100% | 75% | 0 | 25% | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 8 |
| Mpls. VIP | 27% | 20% | 64% | 50% | 0 | 20% | 9% | 10% | 11 | 10 |
| Mounds View | 56% | 60% | 38% | 40% | 6% | 0 | 0 | 0 | 16 | 10 |
| Robbinsdale | 64% | 56% | 36% | 44% | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 11 | 9 |
| Rochester | 64% | 40% | 36% | 40% | 0 | 20% | 0 | 0 | 11 | 10 |
| St. Paul | 73% | 78% | 27% | 11% | 0 | 11% | 0 | 0 | 11 | 9 |
| South St. Paul | 64% | 80% | 36% | 10% | 0 | 10% | 0 | 0 | 11 | 10 |
| Staples | 86% | 50% | 14% | 50% | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 10 |
| White Bear Lake | 0 | 50% | 0 | 50% | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 |
| Total Program % | 62% | 61% | 34% | 34% | 3% | 5% | 1% | 1% | 125 | 125 |

Table X

PARENT SELF-REPORTS ON THE DEGREE TO WHICH THEY HAVE CHANGED AS A RESULT OF THE PROGRAM

Question: How much have you changed what you do as a parent since beginning the program? Have you changed . . . . (a) a great deal, (b) somewhat, (c) not too much, or (d) not at all?*

| | Percentage in Each Category | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Program Location | A Great Deal | Somewhat | Not too much | Not at all | Number Responding |
| Backus | 30% | 50% | 20% | 0 | 10 |
| Bloomington | 10% | 70% | 10% | 10% | 10 |
| Lewiston | 10% | 60% | 20% | 10% | 10 |
| Mankato | 0 | 60% | 20% | 20% | 10 |
| Mpls. Powderhorn | 11% | 67% | 11% | 11% | 9 |
| Mpls. VIP | 0 | 70% | 10% | 20% | 10 |
| Mounds View | 0 | 70% | 30% | 0 | 10 |
| Robbinsdale | 44% | 33% | 11% | 11% | 9 |
| Rochester | 20% | 60% | 10% | 10% | 10 |
| St. Paul | 22% | 44% | 11% | 22% | 9 |
| South St. Paul | 33% | 55% | 0 | 11% | 9 |
| Staples | 30% | 40% | 0 | 30% | 10 |
| White Bear Lake | 20% | 50% | 0 | 30% | 10 |
| Total Program | 17% | 57% | 12% | 14% | 126 |

*(Note: this question was not asked in 1976)

Table XI

PARENTS' VIEWS ON RELATIVE FUNDING PRIORITY FOR THESE PROGRAMS

Question: There are many demands made on legislators to fund a large variety of different educational programs. Given the problems in funding all educational programs these days, how important should funding for early childhood and family education programs be? Would you say early childhood and family education should be considered. . .

| Program Location | A top priority for state funding | Important but not a top priority | A low priority but some funding | Not important enough for any state funding | Number responding |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Backus | 70% | 30% | 0 | 0 | 10 |
| Bloomington | 40 | 60 | 0 | 0 | 10 |
| Lewiston | 30 | 70 | 0 | 0 | 10 |
| Mankato | 30 | 50 | 20% | 0 | 10 |
| Mpls. Powderhorn | 90 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 10 |
| Mpls. VIP | 11 | 67 | 11 | 11% | 9 |
| Mounds View | 60 | 40 | 0 | 0 | 10 |
| Robbinsdale | 89 | 11 | 0 | 0 | 9 |
| Rochester | 30 | 40 | 30 | 0 | 10 |
| St. Paul | 78 | 22 | 0 | 0 | 9 |
| South St. Paul | 40 | 60 | 0 | 0 | 10 |
| Staples | 40 | 60 | 0 | 0 | 10 |
| White Bear Lake | 70 | 30 | 0 | 0 | 10 |
| Total Program | 52% | 42% | 5% | 1% | 127 |

## SITE-BY-SITE VARIATIONS

The first part of this report was aimed at providing an overview of all thirteen CQE early childhood/family education programs. Our purpose was to look for patterns that cut across programs, to paint an aggregate picture of the total CQE effort.

This part of the report has just the opposite purpose. Here we shall attempt to briefly capture the unique character of each individual program site. Three kinds of information will be provided about each site: (1) an overview statement outlining the program components offered, special program features, the nature of the target population, and basic thrust of program efforts and activities; (2) full and detailed descriptions of program activities observed on the day of the site visit; and (3) comments made about the program by parents in response to open-ended telephone interview questions.

Each program was visited for a full day by two trained observer/interviewers. Observers used a structured observation schedule to describe activities occurring on the day of the visit. Dates for the visits were selected by local program staff. All but one program was visited on the date specified as the staff's first choice for the site visit; the one exception was visited on the date specified as second choice. All site visits took place between February 16th and March 8th.

The site visit observations provide a snapshot of a program on a particular day. It could have been a typical day or an unusual day.

Staff could have been unusually well-prepared or unusually nervous. We would caution the reader against treating any single observation as completely representative of a program's full range of activities over the course of a year.

In order to visit sites on the dates they chose and in order to complete all visits within a three week period ten different site visitors were used. (On one day three sites were visited simultaneously.) This introduces some variation in the nature of the details recorded by different observers. The name of the observer is included with each observation.

Overall, twenty-four different activities were observed at twelve sites. (The Minneapolis V.I.P. program consists entirely of home visits; by mutual agreement we made no attempt to observe any home visits because the presence of a researcher would have been overly intrusive.) The activities observed can be categorized as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| Parent education activities | 7 |
| Children's activities | 7 |
| Parent and child combined activities | 9 |
| EPS | 1 |
| Total separate observations | 24 |

We would add that we have not attempted to provide full descriptions of each program. These descriptions are only one part of a larger CQE report which includes detailed activity descriptions from each program. What we are presenting here is an overview of information obtained in a single day's visit. At the end of the thirteen individual site descriptions we have provided a summary of the structured observation data.

SUMMARY OF STRUCTURED OBSERVATION DATA
FOR ALL TWENTY-FOUR OBSERVATIONS

Nature of the Activity Observed

| | |
|---|---|
| Parent education activities | 7 |
| Children's activities | 7 |
| Parent and child combined activities | 9 |
| Early and periodic screening | 1 |
| Total separate observations | 24 |
| Number of sites at which observations were made | 12 |

(Minneapolis V.I.P. has no center activities to observe)

Appropriateness of the Facility to the Activity Observed

Observation Scale:

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The facility is not appropriate, greatly inadequate | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | The facility is highly appropriate, completely adequate |
| Results: | 0 | 0 | 3 | 11 | 9 | |

Degree to Which the Facility is Comfortable for Activities Observed

Observation Scale:

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The facility is very uncomfortable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | The facility is very comfortable |
| Results: | 0 | 0 | 3 | 10 | 9 | |

Attractiveness of Facility for Purposes Used

Observation Scale:

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Highly unattractive space | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Highly attractive space |
| Results: | 0 | 2 | 8 | 10 | 3 | |

Extent to Which the Activity is Well-planned

Observation Scale:

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Poorly planned | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Well planned |
| Results: | 0 | 0 | 3 | 7 | 12 | |

Extent to Which the Purpose of the Activity is Clear

Observation Scale:

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Purpose Unclear | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Purpose Clear |
| Results: | 0 | 0 | 1 | 6 | 14 | |

Extent to Which the Activity is Well-integrated and Flowing, or Choppy and Segmented

Observation Scale:

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Not well integrated, choppy, segmented activities | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Well integrated, flowing activities |
| Results: | 0 | 0 | 5 | 4 | 13 | |

Participants Active - Passive

Observation Scale:

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Participants Passive | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Participants Active |
| Results: | 0 | 0 | 2 | 10 | 12 | |

Staff Domination Versus Participant Input in Activities Observed

Observation Scale:

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| High staff control, low participant input | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | High participant input |
| Results: | 0 | 1 | 3 | 8 | 10 | |

Formality - Informality of Interactions

Observation Scale:

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Highly formal interactions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Highly informal interactions |
| Results: | 0 | 1 | 3 | 14 | 5 | |

Degree to Which Staff Work Together (if more than one staff person present)

Observation Scale:

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Staff work separately | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Staff work together |
| Results: | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 9 | |

Only one staff person present in activity: 8